

3.1 Strategy and planning for blended learning

The provider's strategy, infrastructure and policies systematically address and enable existing or planned arrangements for blended learning (incorporating online learning).

Procedures are in place to ensure:

3.1.1 That a strategic approach to the use of blended learning is explicit and is shared with staff, learners and other stakeholders. A strategic plan includes appropriate investment in infrastructure and contingency arrangements to support all options for blended learning in an online context. Accountable key roles have been identified. A strategic plan for online learning should be clearly linked (or incorporated into) the institution's overall education/teaching

and learning strategy, and it should be widely understood and appropriately cross-referenced with other key institutional policies, strategies and plans. Approaches to online learning taken by individual units are in line with institutional plans. Approved strategies and implementation plans are clear about the provider's aspirations in relation to blended learning.

3.1.2 Policies, regulations and processes (including administration) are fit-for-purpose in the context of blended learning. The relevance of existing arrangements originally designed for face-to-face provision may not always be appropriate and/or effective in the blended learning context. Examples include:

- online developments that are subject to business case approval for viability and sustainability
- robust costing models which take into account the additional costs associated with IT support; developing and updating learning resources; induction, training and support for staff and learners
- proposals where market intelligence demonstrates that the scale of demand and income will ensure viability and sustainability
- recruitment and admissions policies and processes that allow for any online requirements
- clarity in any additional registration arrangements deemed necessary by the provider
- appeals and complaints policies and processes which accommodate remote learning
- fees policy and processes which take note of online provision
- arrangements for online assessment including pre-assessment, the conduct of assessment and marking/grading which are robustly tested and invoke confidence
- regulations and arrangements for Boards of Examiners and external examiners which include any additional consideration of online learning experiences

3.1.3 The strategies and processes for the appointment, induction, training, professional development and appraisal arrangements for teaching and support staff are appropriate and specific to blended and online learning. For example:

- Staff engaged to support online learners can either demonstrate previous experience of online provision or are provided with appropriate induction and training.
- There is a planned approach to the appointment of (or access to) specialist staff to support the provider's blended learning strategy. For example, specialist staff with academic, technical or professional expertise in the pedagogy/assessment appropriate to online learning and in educational technology.

- There is planned close collaboration between the academic and other support personnel and specialist staff, such as teams involved in designing learning technologies and other methodologies supporting online learning.
- There is a planned approach to staff guidance of online learners on any open education resources referenced including any intended or unintended endorsement of such resources.

Subject expertise and academic standing remain important criteria in recruiting appropriate staff but also include appropriate competencies required, for example, in designing a programme, understanding the pedagogical differences within a curriculum of supporting learners in a blended learning environment, such as virtual learning environment.

3.1.4 Arrangements for assuring compliance with any legal or regulatory obligations are appropriate to the blended learning and online learning context. For example, this may include:

- child protection
- intellectual property and copyright
- clear parameters on data protection including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- protection for enrolled learners
- applicable professional or statutory body requirements
- local regulatory considerations in the context of transnational provision

3.1.5 Processes are fit-for-purpose in the case of learners located outside Ireland. Regulations and institutional processes that are appropriate in the face-to-face context can be a challenge in the blended learning or online learning context, including those governing Boards of Examiners/Results Approval Panels and external examiners; appeals and complaints; and student disciplinary arrangements.

3.1.6 Arrangements for collaboration or partnership as set out in the Core Statutory QA Guidelines facilitate any additional responsibilities to be specified for learners in a blended learning context.